The birth of our Madonna
The storied history behind the local landmark

ALSO
Modernism in the IE
Micro cars you’ll adore
Avoiding dangers of common drugs
from the editor

A well-traveled woman and still-fresh ideas

MADONNA is a woman who gets around, or who has gotten around depending on how you look at it. Not the religiously famous Madonna or the aging pop star, but the Madonna of the Trail, or as I like to call her, our Madonna.

Her story tumbles through the lives of a German immigrant in St. Louis, a county judge from Missouri, ladies of the DAR — both of today and decades ago — and even snagged a toehold, if reports are true, aboard the USS Harry S. Truman, a Nimitz-class, nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, with a photo stationed in the captain’s quarters.

And believe it or not, the Madonna has sisters — 11 that we know of — scattered across the nation, marking points in our nation’s history.

The great grandson of the sculptor says he doesn’t know what happened to the original which was probably made of clay over some support structure. She was likely destroyed in the making of the mold for the statue we see today at the corner of Foothill Boulevard and Euclid Avenue in Upland.

She is made of algonite — a cement like mixture comprised of crushed marble and granite, perhaps even including lead ore.

A few years ago, Carla Sanders and I both enjoyed seeing a panoramic photo of the statue surrounded by a gathering of colorful looking folks taken on Admission Day in 1930. For this issue, we decided it was time to track down that photo, part of which is on pages 14 and 15 (the larger image is on our Facebook page), and tell our Madonna’s story.

No matter where you live in our Inland Valley, you can call her your Madonna too because she was placed here as a tribute to the women who had the courage to face adversity and to tame both the West and her often-unruly sons and daughters.

That’s our Southern California, our history. And if you’re here today, it’s your history too.

Also in this issue, we explore another part of the past with Palm Springs’ celebration of Modernism, an art, architecture and design style that was marked by clean lines, sharp angles and an integration of interior and exterior spaces.

We also learned from Cal Poly’s Bruce Lee Emerton that Pomona, too, has a rich heritage in the design movement.

And we discovered small, no make that micro, cars in our own backyard. These fuel-efficient, low-maintenance gems are something to behold, even if they were built 30 to 50 years ago.

Let’s take stock: honoring family and courage, beautiful, clean modern design, gas-miser small cars, all from years ago.

As one of my historian friends might say, “Who’d’ve thunk it?” People had good ideas long before we came along.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of Inland Living Magazine as much as we did putting it together. Our best to you.

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O Pioneers!
Upland’s Madonna of the Trail is one of 12 from California to Maryland

By CARLA SANDERS

FOR MORE THAN 80 YEARS, the Madonna of the Trail monument in Upland has stood watch, a symbol of a courageous pioneering spirit that helped settle America. She gazes southward under her worn bonnet, cradling a baby in her left arm while gripping a rifle barrel with her right. Her young son holds tightly to a clutch of her apron. The inscription on one side explains that, along this route in 1826, a man named Jedediah Smith and 16 trappers, searching for a westward flowing river, became the first Americans to enter California by land.
That seems remarkable in itself — the place in history of this busy intersection at Foothill Boulevard and Euclid Avenue. But what’s little known is that this statue, this larger-than-life woman, is replicated 11 other times across the United States.

The statues were the culmination of years of work by the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, aided by a man who would one day be president of the United States.

The story begins in St. Louis in the early 1900s, when a group of women there, members of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, decided that the pioneer migration route from east to west — the old Santa Fe Trail — should somehow be recognized. Also engaged in the project was the National Old Trails Association, formed in 1912 with Judge Harry Truman, of Independence, Mo., as its president.

Initially, small cast-iron markers were proposed to designate the route. In 1924, however, that plan was changed and the DAR agreed on 12 large monuments.

Three years later, August Leimbach, a German immigrant who was living in St. Louis at the time, was chosen as the sculptor for the mammoth piece of public art, which rises 18 feet above the ground and which he called “The Madonna of the Trail.”

In the summer 1928 issue of The Federal Illustrator Magazine, Leimbach described his work:

“The idea I had, when I modeled the design was this: The pioneer mother with her children was waiting for the father at their blockhouse in the wild West, for the father did not come home as he had promised. She, believing him to be in danger, put her little child in a blanket, grasped the gun and with the boy ran out in the field to look for the father.

“The gun is sketched from the gun of Daniel Boone, with his carvings on the shaft. On the ground is prairie grass and cactus brushes, also arrowheads, and on one side in the shadows, there is visible in the original, a rattlesnake, partly covered by grass.

“When I was a schoolboy in the old country, the American history of the pioneer days made a deep impression on me. I thought often of those who had left the old home and all that was dear to them and had come to this country to find a field for their ambition.

Pioneer Migration Route

That is why the idea I had was to represent the pioneer mother with her children waiting for the father who had not come home as he promised. She, believing him to be in danger, took her little child and ran out in the field with the gun to look for the father.

“The gun is sketched from the gun of Daniel Boone, with his carvings on the shaft. On the ground is prairie grass and cactus brushes, also arrowheads, and on one side in the shadows, there is visible in the original, a rattlesnake, partly covered by grass.

“When I was a schoolboy in the old country, the American history of the pioneer days made a deep impression on me. I thought often of those who had left the old home and all that was dear to them and had come to this country to find a field for their ambition.

Written in stone
The inscriptions on each of the four sides of the statue’s base:

FRONT
Madonna of the Trail
N.S.D.A.R. Memorial
to the Pioneer Mother
of the Covered Wagon Days
(N.S.D.A.R. refers to National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution)

BACK
The National Old Trails Road
A newer commemorative plaque from the California Society of the DAR has been placed below these words.

WEST
Over this trail, Jedediah Smith, seeking a river flowing westward, led a band of sixteen trappers, the first Americans to enter California by land.

EAST
This trail, trod by the padres in Spanish days, became, under Mexican rule, the road connecting San Bernardino and Los Angeles, later the American post road.

At left, one of sculptor August Leimbach’s original sketches
IMAGE COURTESY KEVIN KARL
www.kevinkarlstudio.com

“When I came to America, I often saw these people of the pioneer type, strong and brave and always ready to protect themselves against any danger. Asked to make a sketch model for a monument of a woman of pioneer days, I was inspired by my own impression of these people I had met, and the Madonna of the Trail is the result.”

From Maryland to California, the Madonna of the Trail statues were erected in 12 states to mark westward expansion.
The trail of the Madonna

The statues of the Madonna, pinpointed below with their dedication dates, are scattered across the National Old Trails Road, an ocean-to-ocean highway established in 1912. Much of the route also follows the Santa Fe Trail of the 1800s. The image below was developed from an undated, hand-drawn map posted on the Federal Highways Administration website. www fhwa dot gov/infrastructure/trailsc cfm

Statuesque facts

Each Madonna of the Trail statue looms 18 feet above the ground. The woman stands 10 feet tall and weighs 5 tons. The 6-foot-high base sits on a 2-foot-high foundation. The monuments are made from a pinkish algonite (a poured mixture comprised of crushed rocks) and each carries an inscription relevant to that locale’s place in history.

The statues feature a pioneer woman cradling a baby in her left arm while gripping the barrel of a rifle with her right. Her young son clings to a clutch of her apron. On the ground is prairie grass, cactus brushes, arrowheads, and on one side in the shadows, a rattlesnake, partly covered by grass.
PHOTO BY JENNIFER CAPPUCCIO MAHER

Helen Baxter, left, Jean Bartholomew and Julie Scheuermann, of the Daughters of the American Revolution, hold scrapbooks they’ve compiled about the Madonna of the Trail.

The first statue was dedicated in Springfield, Ohio, on July 4, 1928, and the final one on April 19, 1929, in Bethesda, Md.

The Upland monument — the westernmost of the 12 — was 11th in the series. It was dedicated on Feb. 1, 1929, in a lavish ceremony that brought out regional and national dignitaries and was afforded pages of press coverage at the time.

The dedication, attended by hundreds, featured a parade, floats and speeches, according to news stories contained in DAR scrapbooks in the Model Colony Room of Ontario’s Ovitt Family Community Library.

John Steven McGroarty, a noted California historian and writer, was the principal speaker. Future U.S. president Truman was expected to attend — and his name is listed in the official program — but he was not able to make it, according to Jean Bartholomew, chairman of the DAR’s Madonna of the Trail Committee.

During the unveiling, the monument was dedicated “To the honor and glory of the great motherhood of the past.” And there she has stood for 82 years and counting.
When August Leimbach was chosen to create a monument for the National Old Trails Road Association, the Daughters of the American Revolution put its faith in the talented hands of a European son.

Leimbach was born Feb. 12, 1882, in Elberfeld, Germany, and even in grade school he was utilizing his artistic talents, according to his great-grandson, photographer Kevin Karl, of Steamboat, Nev. Leimbach had big plans to take his trade and talent to the Orient when his brother, then living in St. Louis, suggested he come there instead.

Leimbach took him up on it, arriving in the United States in 1910 at age 28. He stayed briefly in St. Louis before finding work as an architectural sculptor with a firm in Waco, Texas, where he remained for the next two years, Karl says.

During his travels afterward, Leimbach met up with colleagues from Germany and California and they decided to stay in California and do work for the 1915 World’s Fair in San Francisco. The sculptor also completed various other jobs, eventually returning to St. Louis.

Meanwhile, the DAR was having difficulty finding a sculptor suitable to create the statues it was seeking to install. A monument company already had been chosen to cast the statues and the owner suggested that Leimbach submit a proposal to Arlene Nichols Moss, the DAR chairwoman in St. Louis.

“I couldn’t believe this man I was related to,” says Kevin Karl. “He gave me the ability to do artwork myself.”

Karl never met his great-grandfather - he only became aware of him as a teenager after August Leimbach’s death. And he doesn’t know what happened to the original statue carved for the Madonna monuments.

Some things, like August’s notebook, are just lost. But Karl maintains his family’s artistic heritage through his own work and the scraps of Leimbach’s portfolio which, through the years, have come into his keeping.

The self-taught artist, designer and photographer lives in Steamboat, Nev., where he embraces the beauty of the West and makes a living selling his own photography, as well as original art and a dabbling of bakery and organic goods.

“He pulled a couple all-nighters and put the prototype together in three days,” Karl reports. “Mrs. Moss stopped by his home studio and fell in love with the model. She asked him to send it to Washington, D.C., for approval and the rest, as they say, is history.”

The DAR approved “The Madonna of the Trail” plans in 1927. Leimbach finished the monument within a month, and the 12 statues were then cast from this initial model. All were installed between July 1928 and April 1929. Leimbach and his wife eventually returned to Germany, and he moved to Michelstadt in 1952. He died there on Dec. 18, 1965.
‘We are very protective of her as DAR members. She’s a symbol of women coming westward in the days when it was very, very difficult.’

(Continued from page 19.) an array of residents and dignitaries lined up in front of the base, with the woman towering overhead.

The statue was damaged in the Feb. 28, 1990, Upland earthquake, which rocked in at a magnitude of 5.2 and caused more than $10 million in damage. Seismic stabilization was completed at a cost of $37,000, and a restoration celebration was held on Sept. 18, 1992. The 75th anniversary was marked with a celebration on Jan. 31, 2004.

The DAR continues to be the keeper of the statue, according to Bartholomew, who serves on the Madonna of the Trail committee with DAR member Helen Baxter.

Their job is to oversee maintenance and inspection, while the City of Upland is responsible for the grounds around it. Items related to the statue — pens, note cards and bookmarks — are sold at the Cooper Regional History Museum in Upland and proceeds go to the maintenance fund.

“We are very protective of her as DAR members,” Bartholomew says. “She’s a symbol of women coming westward in the days when it was very, very difficult.”

During the dedication in 1929, a time capsule was placed at the base, which was opened on the 50th anniversary in 1979. Another capsule, or memory box, was inserted at that time, and is scheduled to be opened in 2029, 100 years after The Madonna of the Trail arrived in Upland — a pioneering woman of epic proportions.